

# **Postmodernism, Skeptics & Transmedicalists**

## **The Moral Libertarian Horizon, Volume 3**

Copyright (c) 2020 TaraElla. All rights reserved.

Available under Creative Commons License (CC BY-NC-ND  
4.0)

**TaraElla** is an author and a singer-songwriter. She is passionate about individual liberty, strong families, and healthy communities.

Visit [www.taraella.com](http://www.taraella.com) to see more of her work.

## Contents

<b>PART I</b> .....	4
Chapter 1: An Insidious Ideology Sweeping the West .....	7
Chapter 2: The Dark Side of Identity Politics .....	22
 <b>PART II</b> .....	 37
Chapter 3: Silencing the Truth for Political Purposes .....	39
Chapter 4: Destroying Everything in the Name of Progress .	48
 <b>PART III</b> .....	 59
Chapter 5: True Rationality Isn't Simply Reactionary .....	61
Chapter 6: It All Started with a Historical Accident .....	67
Chapter 7: How To Tame The Beast.....	81
 Appendix 1: The Moral Libertarian Manifesto.....	 88
Appendix 2: The 1990s, a Beacon of Hope with a Warning..	96
Appendix 3: Lessons from the Gay Marriage Movement .....	98

## PART I

Let's start with this scenario. Mack is your average young man in a Western society. He is a dedicated gamer, and he loves learning about geeky computer stuff. He has never been particularly into politics or popular culture, but in recent years he's been feeling increasingly uncomfortable about some of the things that are happening around him. He fears that the society he grew up in is changing so fast that it is becoming unrecognizable, and it is changing for the worse too. Worse of all, he feels like he is being pressured to simply shut up and accept everything.

Sue-Jane is a college student, who is passionate about social justice issues. She has always been sympathetic to the underdogs and the outcasts of society. Since she started college two years ago, she has learned much more about the world around her. Her vision of 'social justice' has greatly expanded during this time. However, she feels like sometimes she doesn't fully understand what 'social justice' movements are actually doing, and why they do certain things, things that she doesn't think are useful for helping disadvantaged people in society. Scared that she may be doubting the movement out of her own ignorance, she generally doesn't challenge what the leaders say.

Tess is a young trans woman, who came out and started transitioning about ten years ago. She has been grateful for

the support of the LGBT community and its allies throughout the difficult process. However, in the past few years, she feels like the LGBT community has fundamentally changed, in a very problematic way. There's a new dogma that people are simply pressured to accept, even though it doesn't always make sense. There's an increasing victim mentality that is sapping the energy and optimism in the community. There's an increasingly oppositional attitude towards mainstream society, something that Tess finds particularly unhealthy. Recently, she has decided to do some research to find out where all these changes are coming from. However, the information she has gathered is confusing, with lots of jargon that she doesn't understand. Meanwhile, her friends in the LGBT community simply tell her that she should 'get with the times', as if it's just unfashionable to question these changes.

*Mack: You have to look at this objectively. Political correctness gone mad is a fact, not my own opinion.*

*Sue-Jane: I don't see any objective fact to support your claims. Can you tell me what facts, exactly, you are basing your claims on?*

*Mack: You know, people can't even make a joke anymore. Everything is problematic. Everything is racist, sexist, homophobic, and so on. There's also too much fuss about pronouns...*

*Sue-Jane: I have to stop you here. Basic respect of our fellow citizens is a responsibility of all. And that includes respecting people's pronouns.*

*Mack: I'm not disrespecting anyone. I'm not even refusing to use people's preferred pronouns. What I'm concerned about is...*

*Sue-Jane: Then what are you worried about? People who aren't bigots have nothing to fear from social justice culture!*

*Tess: I think Mack may have a point.*

*Sue-Jane: Really? He's trying to belittle people like you. He's opposed to your rights! Why do you defend him?*

*Tess: Because I'm more interested in the truth. And the wellbeing of everyone. I think there really is a problem with the way some of the things are changing. Besides, I don't think the recent changes benefit people like me at all. I suspect people with an agenda are using us for their own purposes. SJ, even you couldn't rule it out when we talked about this possibility last week. So, especially for the sake of 'people like me', I think it's time we had an honest conversation about everything.*

*Sue-Jane: I guess you have a point too. While I generally support social justice movements because I want to help the disadvantaged, sometimes I don't understand why they do the things they do either. I guess we should get to the bottom of the truth.*

## Chapter 1: An Insidious Ideology Sweeping the West

To understand a lot of the unnecessary conflicts, cultural crises and mutual distrust in the Western world today, we should probably start with 'critical theory'. Critical theory is a term that most people are probably not familiar with, but it has already had a huge impact on the culture of the Western world, thanks to its disproportionate influence among some sections of academia and left-leaning intellectuals, starting with the Baby Boomer generation (this will be discussed further in Chapter 6).

### How Critical Theory Changed Western Society

So what is critical theory? To tell the story of critical theory (small c and t), we need to begin with Critical Theory (capital C and T). Critical Theory, with the capitalization, was invented by the Frankfurt School intellectuals in the 1930s. The Frankfurt School started as an institution dedicated to the promotion of Marxism, which was increasingly influential in Germany at the time. However, the Frankfurt School was decidedly unorthodox in its 'Marxism': for example, it mixed elements of Freudian psychoanalysis into its work. Rather unusual for a 'Marxist' institution, it also produced a lot of cultural (rather than economic) critique.

Critical Theory is basically the application of what the Frankfurt School intellectuals thought to be 'the method of Marx' to study all sorts of phenomenon, including, particularly, cultural phenomenon. At this point, many of you may be a bit bewildered. After all, Marx and Marxism didn't have a lot to say about culture, other than the idea that culture is downstream from the economic system. But somehow, the Frankfurt School intellectuals thought that the 'method' Marx used to study capitalism in *Das Kapital* could be applied to other, non-economic phenomenon. In fact, the 'critical' in Critical Theory comes from the subtitle of *Das Kapital*, 'A Critique of Political Economy'. Critical theorists thus believe that their work is part of the same tradition as *Das Kapital*, even though this is disputed by orthodox Marxists. Of course, Critical Theory, being inspired by Marxism, was never meant to be just theoretical, but rather, it was meant to change the world in revolutionary ways. Thus Critical Theory always invited practical application in the real world, and it is the real world effects we should be most concerned about. While Critical Theory (with the capitalization), as invented by the Frankfurt School, provides the foundation of all critical theory, their method has since been generalized to fields even further than the early Frankfurt School could have envisioned. Furthermore, specialized forms of critical theory, for example critical race theory and critical gender theory, have been developed in more recent decades, and these have strongly influenced movements around identity politics. The term 'critical theory' (without the capitalization) refers to all these developments collectively.

To understand critical theory and its effects on society, we need to start with the method they use to 'critique', i.e. the aforementioned so-called 'method of Marx'. So what is this 'method of Marx' they are talking about? And what essentially happens when you apply it to culture? (I've decided to put the following in point form, so that important points aren't missed.)

**1) An Emphasis on Group-Based Conflict:** Firstly, there's the perspective of history being driven by class-based conflicts. Marx thought that the history of humanity was driven by economic class struggles in every era. Likewise, critical theorists believe that human society is fundamentally divided into oppressor classes (groups) and oppressed classes (groups), with conflict between these inevitable and necessary for social change. The main difference is that Marx's classes were always economic, but the oppressor and oppressed groups in critical theory are often culturally defined. Furthermore, critical theory's group-based worldview leaves little room for individual conscience and individual choices. Hence, for example, the accusation that 'all men' contribute to patriarchy no matter their individual choices.

**2) A Belief in Liberation Through Conflict, and Aversion to Peaceful Negotiation:** Marx believed that only the workers can liberate themselves through their struggle against and their overthrow of the bourgeois class. This, in turn, was inspired by Hegelian thought on the master and the slave.

Likewise, critical theorists often believe that the only way 'oppressed' groups can be liberated is by their own struggle against 'oppressor' groups, since the 'oppressor' groups wouldn't give way without a struggle. This, in my opinion, is a false reduction of cultural relations to the crudeness of economic relations, something critical theorists are (by definition) prone to. The problem is, in this worldview, there is no room for negotiation and compromise, and conflict is celebrated. This leads to increased mutual misunderstanding and distrust, and prevents the negotiation and consensus building that is required to create solutions that can serve everyone well.

**3) An Excessive and Unbalanced Obsession With Historical Injustice:** In his work, Marx also analyzed how the economic classes in 19th century Europe came to be, by studying history. He showed that property-less workers came to be that way because of historical circumstances, rather than their own fault or laziness. This probably inspired the critical theory obsession with history, and how the current social situation of certain 'oppressed' groups can be traced to historical injustice. The problem with this obsession is that historical injustice is an endless pit, and the endless demands for reparations from this endless pit eventually leads to a society whose agenda is dominated by group-based claims. When this situation is established, there will be no way to break through this 'stage' and move back to a society built on equal opportunity and individual merit. Other problems include the fact that historical injustice can be difficult to quantify and competing claims of historical injustice often

cannot be weighed objectively. Furthermore, consistent with its group-based worldview, the critical theory approach to historical injustice only considers injustice towards groups, and not injustice done to particular individuals or families. Giving reparations to certain injustices while neglecting to even recognize others effectively leads to a double dose of injustice for some, which could eventually create widespread resentment and social instability.

**4) The Encouragement of Victim Mentality:** Marxism is a materialist philosophy, and Marx believed that a person's conscience is derived from their material conditions. As some put it, Marxists don't believe in 'I think therefore I am'. Rather, they believe that 'I am therefore I think'. In critical theory, while there is less emphasis on economic material conditions, there is a general attitude that people are defined mainly by their membership of an oppressed or oppressor class. Considerations about individual conscience or character are often dismissed in favor of group membership-based views. Furthermore, Marxists are particularly wary of what they call 'false consciousness', for example the workers feeling solidarity with their bosses, and are particularly keen to cultivate class consciousness, that is the workers being aware of their oppression by the bourgeoisie. Likewise, critical theory encourages the culturally 'oppressed' to develop a 'consciousness' of being oppressed. Hence, in identity politics movements influenced by critical theory, women, ethnic minorities and LGBT people are actively encouraged to feel oppressed and to feel angry at the rest of the world, and individuals from these categories who refuse

to share in this victim mentality are often shunned. Individuals from these categories who actively speak up against the victim mentality are sometimes labeled 'Uncle Toms', or even traitors to their group. The problem is that, the cultivation of victim mentality actually causes a double dose of injustice to already disadvantaged minorities, because people who constantly believe the odds are stacked against them are much less likely to succeed in life. This, in my opinion, is one of the most harmful effects of critical theory thinking.

**5) A Negative Attitude Towards both Traditional Culture and Enlightenment Values:** This has relatively little to do with anything about applying 'the method of Marx' to culture, although it could be loosely justified on Marx's idea that culture is downstream from economics. Rather, it has more to do with the views of some 20th century Western Marxists, including some of the Frankfurt School thinkers. Marx believed that workers would naturally rise up and overthrow their bosses, when capitalism developed to a certain stage. Early Marxists believed that Marx's prediction was inevitable. But as the decades passed by and the revolution never happened in the West, some Western Marxists turned to the theory of 'cultural hegemony' to explain their disappointment. In this theory, the advanced capitalist West had developed a cultural hegemony of capitalist culture that kept the workers in their place and prevented revolution. Almost everything in Western culture, from traditional religious views to contemporary popular culture, was thought to be part of this cultural hegemony.

This led to the attitude that the existing culture and its institutions were inherently in the service of capitalist society and hence oppressive. As such, some Western Marxists and critical theorists sought to actively disrupt or destroy existing cultural norms, including family values, norms around modesty and morality, norms around rational debate, and even, in the case of Herbert Marcuse (one of the most influential Frankfurt School thinkers), the classical liberal values of tolerance and free speech. Marcuse openly advocated for the suppression of conservative views in his 1965 essay titled 'Repressive Tolerance'.

As you can see, the application of common critical theory perspectives has led to deleterious consequences in Western societies. People have been pit against each other based on their membership of culturally defined groups. Cultural conflicts have been ramped up, and resolution via mutual understanding and reconciliation has been discouraged. History has been revisited more and more often, and previously buried conflicts are being reignited without obvious benefit. Disadvantaged and/or minority groups are increasingly being encouraged by activists to uptake a victim mentality and an oppositional posture to mainstream society, often to the detriment of the wellbeing of members of such groups. Traditional cultural institutions like marriage and family are being constantly devalued. Core Enlightenment values like free speech and universal tolerance are being discredited and denounced as tools of the oppressors, and unfair practices like the 'progressive

stack', or even essentially barbaric practices like 'no-platforming', are increasingly being justified.

## Why We Should Consider Postmodernism Within the whole Critical Theory Tradition

Anti-science and truth-denying postmodern philosophy is also sometimes thought of as related to critical theory, and for good reason. Traditional critical theory itself is modernist, rather than postmodernist, in that traditional critical theorists (including members of the Frankfurt School) consider their thinking to be 'rational', even if the rest of us may not agree with that assessment. On the other hand, postmodern philosophy generally rejects things like rationality and unbiased truth. However, if we look closely, we will see that there are in fact a lot of continuities between critical theory thinking and postmodernist thinking. For example, the postmodernist view that illness, gender, sexual orientation, and so on are social constructs that exist in service of the system can be seen as a logical extension of the critical theory view that our existing cultural institutions are in the service of maintaining capitalism. Postmodernism also justifies its core tenets using critical theory-esque arguments: for example, postmodernists consider modern medicine and scientific truth to be but one narrative, and they consider witchcraft or ancient superstition as another narrative that is equally valid. Furthermore, they contend that the elevation of science over witchcraft is a cultural view encouraged by powerful interests, an argument that would

be completely at home in critical theory thinking, and could even be mixed with critical theories around 'systemic racism'. In other words, postmodern philosophy can arguably be seen as just taking critical theory style thinking to its logical conclusion. It turns out that, when everything is to be doubted, when everything is to be seen as due only to historical circumstances and/or in the service of the establishment, when everything is to be seen through the prism of oppression, when nothing is to be considered simply true or sacred anymore, eventually even the fruit of the Enlightenment and the pursuit of truth itself would be seen in similar light, and what you get is postmodernism. In fact, key postmodern thinkers like Michel Foucault are often considered to belong under the broad umbrella of critical theorists, and 'postmodern critical theory' is a thing in academia. Hence, the harm from the anti-science and truth-denying ideas of postmodernism can and should rightly be considered part of the harms of critical theory.

Furthermore, while postmodernism's anti-science and anti-logic excesses are often what people are most concerned with, their political effect cannot be fully explained without looking at postmodernism's function as an additional 'tool' to the critical theory 'toolbox'. For example, contrary to popular belief, postmodernism does not in and of itself lead to radical identity politics. While postmodernism's lack of respect for objective facts is a moral problem, it mainly becomes a political problem through the promotion of subjectivity driven identity politics, which is rooted in the 'radical subjectivity' that Marcuse and other critical theorists

have promoted. In other words, postmodernism often takes on real political significance by linking with political movements inspired by critical theory. In turn, critical theory inspired movements become even more problematic and irrational with the additional utilization of postmodern theory.

**Therefore, while the title of this book addresses 'postmodernism', in this book we are actually addressing the critical theory tradition as a whole. This is because, fundamentally, the two cannot be discussed separately without losing sight of the bigger picture.**

## *The Moral Libertarian Case Against Safe Speech, Progressive Stack and No-Platforming*

***This is an excerpt from *The Moral Libertarian Idea* by TaraElla.***

*Free speech has always been a cornerstone of Western society post-Enlightenment. However, several recent developments are threatening this important tradition: the promotion of safe speech, progressive stack speaking systems, and the increasing acceptance of no-platforming. As we will discuss one by one, all these practices are to be regarded as immoral and unacceptable under the Moral Libertarian worldview, where every individual must be granted Equal Moral Agency (EMA) as much as possible.*

### *Safe Speech*

*Practicing safe speech, according to its proponents, means making sure that all speech is sensitive to the need to avoid psychologically harming minorities. On the surface, it looks like a noble goal. Surely, whenever I say things, I do try my best not to be hurtful to others. However, the problem is that safe speech is generally not just a matter of personal practice, based on personal conscience. It is policed by both*

*activism and peer pressure. Those who are determined to have breached safe speech codes are punished with a variety of social consequences. Therefore, safe speech is actually a form of censorship against free speech.*

*Since Moral Libertarians demand that every individual must have Equal Moral Agency (EMA), we cannot accept the practice of censoring free speech, even for theoretically noble reasons. Furthermore, our insistence on this point is based in morality: that no individual is anywhere near moral perfection, and therefore no individual has the moral standing to require another individual to submit to them. It also doesn't matter if those demanding submission are in the majority: since all human beings are flawed and imperfect, even the majority's decisions are not guaranteed to always be more morally correct than the lone individual who disagrees. Therefore, the majority shutting down the speech of that lone individual can still be a potential moral wrong. In other words, the majority, made up of flawed human beings, still do not have the moral standing required to be able to shut up the lone dissenting individual. It doesn't even matter if the majority is 100% certain of their moral righteousness: when you are a flawed human being, your '100% certain' still doesn't equate to the Objective Truth.*

*Now, theoretical arguments are not persuasive for everyone, so let's look at an actual example. While safe speech has most often been argued in the context of preventing racist and homophobic speech, this is only the thin end of the*

wedge. Already, there have been attempts to use 'safe speech' to justify disallowing people to say that abortion is immoral, and I actually agree that this is the logical conclusion if you uphold the safe speech principles consistently. Therefore, the application of safe speech can (and actually should) mean that we cannot hold discussions about the morality of abortion at all! My point is that, whether you personally think that abortion is morally acceptable or not, shutting down debate on such a controversial issue would amount to oppressive silence for both sides, and a repudiation of what has always been society's consensus on how to deal with controversial issues. Furthermore, thinking about it, many other morality debates can be shut down using similar justifications, leading to society simply putting a lid on every controversial issue. Nothing but total, oppressive silence. Therefore, the undesirability of 'safe speech' is far from only theoretical!

### *Progressive Stack*

*Progressive stack systems are speaking systems where disprivileged minorities are given first priority to speak. According to its proponents, progressive stack will give minorities more of a voice. Again, even though the intention is noble, moral libertarians simply cannot accept it. Firstly, the fact that some people are assigned a higher speaking priority already makes progressive stack completely incompatible with the notion of Equal Moral Agency. But even more importantly, progressive stack systems require*

*regulation to work, and those ‘regulating’ the system will have complete moral agency over everyone else, since they control whether other people are even allowed to speak at all! Where people have been given a higher priority to speak, they will have been granted this privilege by the regulators, and will be pressured to not upset the regulators. Thus the regulators inevitably end up with a high degree of influence over many other individuals’ speech. This is clearly not acceptable for somebody committed to Equal Moral Agency and a free market of ideas.*

### *No-Platforming*

*Finally, the most outrageous form of speech censorship on the rise today is no-platforming. No-platforming refers to the deliberate denial of a platform to speak for one’s opponents. Practitioners of no-platforming eschew the tried and true way of changing people’s minds with polite and rational debate. Instead, they directly prevent their opponents from speaking up in the first place, for example by pressuring university administrations to cancel appearances, or by shouting over people as they speak. This is, without need for explanation, a flagrant violation of Equal Moral Agency. It is also the metaphorical equivalent of shutting down the marketplace (of ideas) by oppressive force, thus preventing people from ‘buying’ what they want.*

*Think about this: what gives anyone any right to no-platform another? As a fundamentally flawed human being, you don't have any more (or less) moral standing than any other human being. You simply don't have the moral standing to prevent another human being from speaking. Isn't that clear enough?*

## Chapter 2: The Dark Side of Identity Politics

One of the most important ways critical theory has been able to infiltrate into the mainstream is by claiming the mantle of 'social justice' for disadvantaged minorities. Of course, the critical theory model of 'justice' is far from what the term 'social justice' is traditionally understood to mean. However, with this confusion about the true meaning of 'social justice' being an ongoing problem, critical theory has been able to act as an imposter for true ideals of justice in many circles.

### Herbert Marcuse: The Link Between Critical Theory and Identity Politics Today

To understand why critical theory has taken a particular hold among the social activist class, we first need to understand the ideas of Herbert Marcuse, who was probably the most influential member of the Frankfurt School, partly because he moved to America and wrote in English, and partly because he prominently advocated for the application of critical theory in social and political movements.

Back in the mid-20th century, there was a crisis among Western Marxist workers. The workers' revolution Marx predicted had not happened in the West, nor was it

anywhere on the horizon. Various theories were advanced to explain this disappointment. It was in this context that Herbert Marcuse began advocating for using 'social outcasts' instead of workers as the catalyst for change. These probably included ethnic minorities, the unemployable members of society, and so on. Marcuse thought that Western workers were already too integrated and comfortable in the capitalist system, and they had lost the 'revolutionary potential' that Marx saw a century ago. On the other hand, there were still social outcasts who were not permitted to be integrated into the system. These outcasts were thus still completely outside the system, and completely oppressed by it. Marcuse thought that the frustration of the outcasts could be what could bring down the system.

When Marcuse first advanced this vision, he was in fact pessimistic about its chances. Western society in the 1950s and early 1960s was generally prosperous and peaceful, and the prospect of radical change in any case was very low. Furthermore, even his fellow Western Marxists generally saw his views as too revisionary, too much of a departure from orthodox Marxism to be accepted by them. For a while, Marcusean ideas seemed to be destined to become inconsequential. However, the Vietnam War soon happened, and this provided a major catalyst for student-led radicalism in the mid-to-late 1960s. These student radicals were not attracted to American liberalism, because of its association with the Johnson administration and its pro-war stance. They were also not attracted to old-school socialism, because of its association with Stalin and the Soviet Union. Instead, the

student radicals, particularly their leaders, read a lot of Marcuse. In fact, one student radical claimed later in life that he probably read too much Marcuse back then. While many student radicals identified as Marxists, it was instead Marcuse's version of social change that they embraced.

The late 1960s and 1970s also provided fertile ground for Marcusean ideas to be applied. Firstly, there were multiple movements surrounding the rights of disadvantaged minorities, including the civil rights movement, second wave feminism, and so on. This fit in well with Marcuse's aforementioned idea of harvesting various groups' wishes for social change to build a new movement for radical change, in lieu of the original Marxist plan of a revolution started solely by workers. In fact, Marcuse embraced the second wave radical feminist movement late in his life, and this was controversially received by feminists, because some of them saw that he was only using the cause of women's rights as a catalyst for his program of social change.

## The Marcusean Influence on LGBT Activism

One of the emerging social movements during the 1960s and 70s was the gay rights movement. The contemporary gay rights movement is often considered to have begun with the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Naturally, Marcusean-style radicals established a foothold in the emerging movement early on. The fact that most mainstream politicians refused to even

consider the idea of decriminalizing homosexuality back then provided fertile ground for Marcusean-style radicals to position themselves as the true allies of the gay community. Hence, ever since the 1970s, LGBT activism has been divided into a 'radical' faction that is strongly influenced by Marcusean ideas and critical theory in general, and a 'moderate' faction that is driven by obtaining equal legal rights, integration into mainstream society, and winning over public support using persuasion in mainstream forums. Over time, the relative influence of the two factions have waxed and waned over time. For example, during the late 1990s to the early 2010s, with gay marriage being the major LGBT cause, the moderate faction was dominant. In more recent years, the moderate faction's influence appears to be decreasing, and the radical faction appears to be on the rise. This is why ideas derived from critical theory have inserted themselves more and more into the discourse of LGBT politics, displacing the previously dominant rhetoric around shared values, integration and cooperation. Of course, what we need to remember is that both factions are in fact a permanent fixture of the LGBT community, there are a substantial number of people on both sides of the divide at any time, and many LGBT individuals continue to support a vision of integration and cooperation with the mainstream.

While the 'moderate' faction of LGBT activism focuses on things like law reform and building bridges with mainstream society, the 'radical' faction is effectively about putting critical theory into practice, and they certainly don't mind upsetting mainstream society while they are doing that.

Building bridges is certainly not a priority of the radicals. Meanwhile, most observers in the mainstream community don't seem to understand this divide: those who campaign for gay marriage (almost always moderates) sometimes get unfairly lumped in with those who make life difficult for bakeries who don't bake gay wedding cakes (almost always radicals), for example. Likewise, the mistaken view that trans people all believe that gender is a social construct (more on this later).

## The New Radical Feminism that Critical Theory Built

The 'radical' faction of LGBT activism, through embracing critical theory in general, also often promotes ideas from critical theory influenced radical feminism. While feminism had already been around for a century by the 1970s, the influence of ideas under the critical theory umbrella essentially created a fundamentally different form of feminism around this time. Unlike conventional feminism and its focus on equal legal, employment and education rights, second wave radical feminism saw the then-existing society and its sexist relations as a system they call 'patriarchy', and attempted to study this system similar to how Marx studied capitalism, in the hope of eventually 'overthrowing' it (you can see the critical theory influence here). Second wave radical feminists thus criticized marriage, family, and sometimes even liberal democracy and the scientific method, as being in service of the patriarchy, similar to how Marxist critical theorists criticized these things as being in service of

capitalism, and with a similar end goal of abolishing these things. Radical feminist thinking has always had a strong influence on radical LGBT activism; indeed, it is the negative attitude of radical feminists towards marriage that made radical LGBT activists reluctant to embrace the cause of gay marriage for many years, until it became impossible for them to continue to resist and remain credible. Even today, the radical faction of LGBT activism continues to resist the promotion of 'family values' within the LGBT community, much to the dismay of people like myself.

One branch of this kind of radical feminism, 'gender critical feminism', holds that while biological sex is a material reality, all conventional understandings of gender are only social constructs that serve patriarchy and should be abolished. Gender critical feminists vehemently oppose that there can be any biological basis to average differences in temperament, preferences and abilities between the sexes. They instead hold that women, as a class (note the use of Marxian concepts here), are oppressed by men, as a class, because of their material condition (again note the use of Marxian concepts) of having a womb, which is required for the reproduction of labor for capitalism. Also, as a natural consequence of their ideology that male and female brains cannot be different, gender critical feminists oppose the idea that anybody can suffer from the medical condition of gender dysphoria, or that it could require gender transition as the treatment. They instead often use fringe theories about trans people, like those proposed by Blanchard et al., to explain away the problems of trans people. Which is why

some people refer to them as Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs), a term which they themselves do not accept. Another branch of this kind of radical feminism has less of an emphasis on the 'material' difference of having a womb or not. They are instead inclusive of trans women because they believe that both genetic women and trans women are oppressed by the system of patriarchy.

While radical feminists are divided on many fundamental issues (including, for example, their attitude towards trans people), they generally believe that gender, which encompasses all the cultural norms and understandings around the differences between the sexes, is entirely a social construct, and needs to be deconstructed and abolished for the sake of women's liberation. This idea would also find its way into the discourse surrounding the LGBT community, promoted by more 'radical' elements of the LGBT community, to the dismay of its more 'moderate' members. Radical feminist ideas and their interaction with the contemporary LGBT discourse will be further explored in the following chapters.

## Intersectionality: The Coalition That Critical Theory Built

One recent trend in radical feminism, which has also been embraced by radical LGBT activism, is the dominance of the idea of 'intersectionality'. Intersectionality was originally

invented in the late 1980s to describe the situation where individuals with two disadvantaged identities (e.g. black and female) may experience discrimination even when individuals with either identity alone would not experience discrimination (e.g. a company which hires men regardless of race for physical labor, but only hires white people for clerical jobs). It was a good description for an important problem. However, the way 'intersectionality' is used today is only tangentially related to the aforementioned concept. Instead, contemporary calls for 'intersectionality' is essentially a call for coalition building, where an LGBT activist must also support radical feminism and race-based identity politics movements, and vice versa. Critical theory is the glue that holds this 'coalition' together. With radical activists from these groups all heavily influenced by critical theory thinking, they tend to have the same worldview and use similar language anyway, therefore this coalition could be easily built and maintained.

The problem with the new 'intersectionality' is that, by its implications, members of the groups covered by the coalition must not only support the radical ideas of their own activists, they must also support every radical identity politics movement under the sun, or else they could be seen as 'traitors' to their own group. Hence, LGBT individuals are not only pressured to adopt the oppositional attitude to mainstream society their radical activists champion, they are also pressured to accept ideas like how gender is an oppressive social construct, that countries like America are inherently racist, or how white supremacy is everywhere in

Western society, all ideas that are characteristic of critical theory thinking. In recent years, arguing against these ideas has become a risky move for LGBT individuals who want to remain in good standing with some parts of their community.

## *Moral Libertarian Perspective: Why Identity Politics is Often Morally Questionable*

***This is an excerpt from *The Moral Libertarian Idea* by TaraElla.***

*Despite its controversial reputation, identity politics appears to be increasingly influential recently. Maybe the arrival of the new wave of feminism, or perhaps the increased awareness of racial disparities in society, is causing this identity 'awakening'. While I'm personally not a supporter of the identity politics way of looking at things, even I have to agree that identity politics sometimes helps to advance the rights of minorities. However, we also cannot overlook the fact that identity politics as it currently exists is problematic. But how is it problematic? And can we save the best features of identity politics while rejecting the problematic elements?*

*From a moral libertarian perspective, initially there appears to be no problem with identity politics per se. If everyone had equal moral agency, surely some individuals can use their moral agency to advance the rights of the minority group they belong to? There is surely nothing wrong with this. However, things are really not that simple. Identity politics, in practice, often means seeing the world in an in-group vs out-group perspective. This perspective can lead some to only*

*care about the rights and liberty of the in-group, and diminish the need of people outside the group for similar rights and liberty. This us-vs-them mentality doesn't sit very well with a commitment to distribute liberty and moral agency equally among every human being.*

*In recent years, the rise of what I would call critical theory-ism has made identity politics even more problematic. Critical theory-ism is also often called cultural Marxism, but I will avoid that term here because it also refers to a right wing anti-Semitic theory about the Frankfurt School. Besides, critical theory-ism is really not similar to real Marxism in substance, even though it borrows a lot of Marxist language. Basically, critical theory-ism borrows the concepts of class consciousness and class struggle from old-school socialism, but applies these concepts to cultural and identity groups. Thus, women can be seen as an oppressed class, and so can LGBT people or ethnic minorities, and they should 'struggle' against the privileged classes (white, male, heterosexual, and so on). Like how some old-school socialists advocated taking away the rights and liberties of the bourgeois class at least temporarily so that the working class could be liberated, many critical theory-ists have no problems with reverse discrimination, as it's just all part of the 'class struggle' and 'liberation'. Critical theory-ists also demand that good allies in the privileged classes should 'check their privilege', which often includes accepting unfair treatment without complaint. If these supposedly privileged people dare voice concerns about being treated unfairly or vote at elections in a way that they think will end the unfair treatment, they can be labelled*

*right-wing and reactionary. In fact, what I just said could make me a counter-revolutionary enemy in the eyes of critical theory-ists. An us-vs-them, all out culture war thus begins. (Meanwhile, I understand that actual socialists and Marxists are also upset at this situation, because for them class solidarity is the most important thing, and the division of the working class into identity sub-groups is to be strongly discouraged.)*

*Anyone who is not stupid can see that there can be no compatibility between the critical theory-ists' version of identity politics, and the moral libertarian principle of equal moral agency. Moral libertarians believe that every individual in society should have equal moral agency (and hence liberty and political rights), regardless of their identity or cultural characteristics. A woman must not have less moral agency than a man, but then a man also must not have less moral agency than a woman. Therefore, a woman must not have less liberty or political rights than a man, but a man must also not have less liberty or political rights than a woman.*

*However, all this does not mean that moral libertarians cannot have some kind of politics informed by the lived experience of minorities. Unlike Marxists, who stress class solidarity above individual experience, or fascists, who stress national unity above individual experience, we liberals are individualists, i.e. we care most about the individual. Individual liberty, individual needs and individual lived experience serve as the ultimate guide for a truly liberal*

*politics. Liberalism encourages each individual to make the most of their potential, and live their lives according to their own moral compasses. Therefore, it also encourages individuals to identify systematic barriers that prevent them from doing this. It is under the umbrella of liberalism that women, ethnic minorities and LGBT individuals first found the justification that they too deserved equal liberty and equal opportunity, and found the language to express it. While conservatives, socialists and nationalists alike dismissed their concerns as selfish demands that should give way to collectivist objectives, our liberal forerunners listened carefully and helped introduce reforms to make society more liberal for everyone. And in this best tradition, we should continue to listen to what minorities have to say. As moral libertarians, we should not rest until there is equal liberty, equal opportunity, and hence equal moral agency between every individual in society, no matter what minority characteristics they may have.*

*In fact, the liberal version of identity politics, which is all about letting minority voices and lived experience inform us of how to build a more liberal society for all, is much more effective in being truly inclusive than the us-vs-them, culture-as-class struggle version of identity politics. First of all, when we start to think of people collectively as groups rather than as individuals, a group dynamic builds up, where individuals in the group are expected to have primary loyalty to the group. This loyalty often effectively includes following the political agenda of the group leaders. Thus pro-life feminists often find it difficult to have a place in predominantly pro-*

*choice feminist movements. Similarly, politically conservative or even centrist LGBT individuals often find themselves unwelcome in some activist groups led by socialist leaders. Thus such movements end up not serving all women or all LGBT people, they only serve those who politically conform to the activist establishment's wishes. First and second wave feminism often prioritized the needs and experiences of white women, and dismissed the voices of black, Latina and Asian women. Hence the introduction of intersectional feminism. But as much of feminism still has gatekeepers, the agenda of this so-called intersectional feminism is still limited by the agenda of the gatekeepers, making it effectively a Gatekeeper Limited Intersectional Feminism (GLIF). In the liberal version of identity politics, none of this would occur because everyone is welcome to add their voice to the free market of ideas; there simply is no group and therefore no leaders or gatekeepers. Secondly, group-based identity politics not only creates unequal moral agency between groups, it also creates unequal moral agency within groups. Those who do not conform to the activist establishment's agenda effectively have less moral agency, because they are often discouraged from speaking up or even semi-coerced into changing their views. Their disfavored position within the movement also means that they may be excluded from activities of decision making. Thus they experience injustice within the movement itself, which further compounds the injustice they receive from the wider world as a result of their female or minority status. Unlike the group-based approach to identity politics, the liberal approach stresses equal liberty and equal opportunity for each individual, thus by design it will never make people excluded in this way.*



## PART II

*Mack: One thing I really can't agree with you people is the idea that gender can be a social construct. It's completely non-scientific. There's plenty of scientific evidence that gender is biological. Even if you separate physical sex and gender, there is still plenty of evidence that gender-related properties are biological.*

*Sue-Jane: This topic, I actually don't understand very much, to be honest. However, I guess if we treat gender as a social construct, it would make life easier for trans people, right? And as long as it makes life better for other people, isn't that what ultimately matters?*

*Tess: No, treating gender as a social construct doesn't make life better for trans people at all. Mack is right, it is scientifically clear that gender is not a social construct. Moreover, pretending that gender is a social construct denies the suffering of trans people, and prevents others from truly understanding our condition.*

*Mack: So, you don't believe that gender is a social construct? Isn't that what all trans people believe?*

*Tess: Of course not! The idea that gender is a social construct is not what the trans community has historically believed. It's an idea that's been imposed on us recently, just like it's been imposed on the rest of society.*

*Sue-Jane: I guess you learn something new every day. But this sounds really interesting. So who's promoting the idea that gender is a social construct, then? And what purpose does it serve, then? Besides, why do some people keep saying that almost everything is a social construct? What do they really want?*

## Chapter 3: Silencing the Truth for Political Purposes

One common criticism of so-called socially progressive thinking is that it sometimes contains mutually conflicting ideas, that those who support that line of thinking just couldn't reconcile but would not openly challenge either. This makes so-called 'social progressivism' look hypocritical at times. The fact is, so-called 'social progressivism' is actually a coalition of different groups with their own ideas and worldview, and the 'party line' that is taken is often a compromise between the claims of different groups.

One such contradiction in 'social progressivism' is the idea that gender is a social construct, but that trans people are born with an innate gender identity. Clearly, both cannot be true at the same time! The fact is, the idea that gender is a social construct comes from radical feminism, and the idea that trans people are born with an innate gender identity comes from both trans people themselves and medical professionals who are supportive of them. Historically, the two groups have been at odds with each other, precisely over this argument.

### The 'Born This Way' Argument and Transmedicalism

In recent years, the 'born this way' argument has been central to the argument for LGBT rights, particularly gay marriage. The 'born this way' argument has become such a refrain in our culture that Lady Gaga even successfully turned it into a hit song in 2011. In the trans context, the 'born this way' argument has an even longer history. Ever since physician Dr Harry Benjamin published his book on trans people in the 1960s, the understanding that trans people have an inborn medical condition, and therefore that they deserve sympathy and support, has been increasingly accepted by mainstream society. The use of the 'born this way' argument in the context of gay rights during the 1990s and the 2000s had a further mutually reinforcing effect on its application in the trans context. Furthermore, medical research in recent decades has provided some evidence for gender dysphoria as an inborn medical condition, with various hypothesis around its cause (based on genetics, hormone receptors and/or prenatal hormone environment) being increasingly debated. Looking at these developments, it appears that we may finally be getting closer to the a fuller scientific understanding of gender dysphoria.

However, the very idea that there could be a biomedical basis for gender dysphoria essentially means that there are biological differences between male brains and female brains, something that radical feminists cannot accept. Radical feminists see gender as a social construct, and see any other view on this matter as oppressive and in service of the patriarchy. This ideology ultimately stems from critical theory thinking (as I discussed in Chapter 2). The point is,

trans people are living embodiments of a scientific truth that critical theory-based radical feminism simply cannot accept. Indeed, this fundamental disagreement is why historically, radical feminists and the trans community were at odds with each other. Even today, gender critical feminists on one side, and transmedicalists (trans people who see the trans condition as a strictly medical problem) on the other side, continue to not only strongly disagree with each other, but also with the 'new progressive consensus' rooted in postmodern feminism.

## A Political Problem that Needed an Anti-Science Solution

The problem is, if radical feminism and the trans community continue to be at odds with each other, this could represent a tricky situation for the socially radical faction of the left. Their 'intersectional coalition', which includes radical feminists, race-based identity politics activists and radical LGBT activists alike, would not be able to hold. If they sided with the radical feminists over trans people, they could alienate the increasingly LGBT friendly younger generations. If they sided with the trans community over radical feminism, they could tear apart their own long standing alliances. Either choice could spell the end of critical theory based 'intersectional' activism as a viable movement.

Enter postmodern, or third wave (or is it fourth wave now) radical feminism. This form of radical feminism keeps faith with the previous second wave version, in that it is deeply rooted in critical theory thinking. It continues to be critical towards the traditional institutions of society like marriage and family, believing these to be cultural tools of the patriarchy to maintain its power. It continues to believe in gender as entirely socially constructed to serve the needs of the patriarchy, and that it should be deconstructed. It continues to staunchly reject the possibility of any innate differences between male brains and female brains, and is therefore also incompatible with the transmedicalist view of gender dysphoria. Where postmodern feminism differs from second wave radical feminism is its view that even biological sex is a social construct, which allows them to claim that defining people by their biological sex under any circumstance is simply a cultural tool of patriarchy. From here, postmodern feminists can support trans people on the grounds that they believe nobody should ever be limited by the categories of biological sex. This is certainly very different from the original reason for being sympathetic to trans people (because they suffer from gender dysphoria), but it allows the socially radical left to maintain the radical feminist worldview while also being 'supportive' of trans people, thus allowing the 'intersectional coalition' to stay intact.

Of course, it is the prior existence of anti-science postmodern philosophy that has allowed the rise of anti-science postmodern feminism. In particular, the ideas of postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault has been particularly influential.

Foucault believed that Western science existed to serve the needs of the systems of power and oppression in modern Western society, and he disagreed with the idea that impartial truth can be found through using the scientific method. Foucault was particularly skeptical of the scientific truth of the Western medicine. He even believed that mental illness was a social construct! When one adopts a Foucauldian worldview, one can easily justify ignoring the many scientific facts around things like biological sex, and simply declare it all a social construct. Of course, there's a good reason that none of the people who advocate for this postmodernist view have any degrees in biological science or medicine! A bit of basic biomedical education would likely be enough to prevent anyone from ever agreeing with the postmodernist view.

## Why Many Trans People Are Still Unhappy

While postmodern feminists have a fundamentally anti-science worldview, it is true that they are generally supportive of trans people, and sometimes even help advocate for trans rights. Still, many trans people are far from happy with their influence on the public discourse around trans people. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, many trans people know acutely that what postmodern feminists say about trans people is simply not true. Every time a postmodern feminist speaks up about

trans issues, there is great potential that they will misrepresent the trans condition, and further mislead the public about the trans condition. Many trans people know too well that gender isn't a social construct, having experienced gender dysphoria starting at an early age before they were socialized into the expectations of mainstream society. Trans people also know that gender isn't a social construct because they experience gender dysphoria as a very real medical condition, one that they suffer even in private, even when society's expectations is not an issue. To hear the postmodernist distortions about the trans condition and say nothing about it, is essentially to be willing to be misrepresented, something that many people simply cannot tolerate.

Secondly, the postmodern discourse around the trans condition essentially refuses to recognize the struggle and pain that is an important part of the trans experience. The postmodernist account downplays the severe distress associated with gender dysphoria, the actual reason that leads trans people to undergo gender transition, while it 'celebrates' the non-conformity of trans people, as if it were all a game. It leaves no room for trans people to speak up about the struggles they go through, and for these struggles to be recognized by other people. It is sort of like living in an authoritarian society where everyone has to pretend that things are fine, even when they are not.

Finally, the misrepresentation of trans people by postmodern feminists has consequences. The postmodernist account downplays the fact that gender dysphoria is why trans people transition. Instead, it paints trans people as choosing to rebel against the norms of society, and 'celebrates' them as agents of radical change, in an almost Marcusean way. This paints an image of trans people as radicals by choice, rather than as normal people doing their best about a difficult situation. The fact is, the 'choice' of gender transition is often made by trans people because the alternative would be intractable depression. To have to make this difficult decision to improve one's life is already a very difficult matter. For many trans people, it really hurts to be thought of as having chosen a lifestyle to spite mainstream society. Yet the popularization of the postmodern feminist view leads to more and more people having this mistaken view of trans people.

## The Silencing of the Transmedicalists

In Chapter 2, we examined the influence of critical theory, particularly Marcusean Critical Theory, on contemporary identity politics movements. One of the most controversial ideas of Marcuse is that of 'repressive tolerance', where he claimed that indiscriminate tolerance of all ideas is repressive because it favors ideas of the status quo. Instead, he suggested that conservative ideas should not be tolerated. Many contemporary critical theory-based activists have taken his suggestion to heart, and routinely attempt to suppress ideas they see as conservative. One such idea is

transmedicalism, the view that the trans condition is defined by a medical condition called gender dysphoria, as previously explained in this chapter. Critical theory-based radical feminists in particular see transmedicalism as conservative, because it necessarily suggests that male brains and female brains are different in some way and that gender is not entirely a social construct. As previously explained, in the view of radical feminists, such ideas serve the patriarchal system and are therefore conservative. Of course, in the real world, such a theoretical explanation may not be accepted by many people. Therefore, in the real world, the usual course of action is simply to smear transmedicalist ideas as 'harmful', for example by linking them to non-acceptance of non-binary people, which is clearly groundless.

With the rising influence of critical theory-based discourse in the LGBT community in recent years, 'transmedicalist' truth has been made taboo in many LGBT circles. This is compounded by the deliberate promotion of the myth that transmedicalists don't accept non-binary people, which has made some people falsely believe that transmedicalism is a 'hateful ideology'. Under these circumstances, many of the trans people who have only come out more recently have accepted the postmodern party line by default, even if they don't always feel quite right about it. Many of them only find out about transmedicalism later, and are surprised to find that not only is it not hateful at all, it also adequately explains their anguish and their needs.

I don't know what will become of the transmedicalist voice in the LGBT community in the short-to-medium term. While transmedicalists have the truth on their side, the critical theory-based activist establishment is well organized and well funded, and they are hell bent on crushing the transmedicalist voice. However, I encourage transmedicalists to keep speaking up, because only that way will the truth not be drowned out. Moreover, if more transmedicalists spoke up, there would eventually be 'safety in numbers' that would allow even more to speak up, which could eventually lead to a tipping point where transmedicalist ideas potentially become dominant again. Furthermore, if the trans community, a small and marginalized community, can slay the critical theory beast, this would also inspire other parts of society to do so.

## Chapter 4: Destroying Everything in the Name of Progress

One aspect of critical theory thinking has been especially controversial. A recurring theme in critical theory and its associated activism is the idea that almost everything is a social construct, and all such social constructs must be dismantled for the sake of liberation. Why would this be the case? And is it justified?

### When Reality Itself Becomes A Social Construct

Let's start with the idea that almost everything is a social construct. Critical theory is particularly prone to make that conclusion, due to an inheritance from the Marxist tradition. Marx's work did not have too much to say about cultural matters, but Marx had a general belief that all the culture, including all the social and political institutions, and all the dominant ideas of each era, were a product of the underlying economic system, and worked to benefit the dominant class of the system. Later Marxist thinkers, most notably Antonio Gramsci, expanded this idea further, suggesting that the culture and institutions of the advanced capitalist West were responsible for keeping the workers in their place and preventing revolution. Thus, the Western Marxist tradition in which critical theory is rooted has a strong tendency to question every part of the status quo, and to suspect that it is all a construct in the service of the powerful and privileged.

Postmodern philosophy in particular takes this view to the extreme: it denies even the fundamental faith in scientific truth that has underpinned Western intellectualism since the Enlightenment, instead favoring the use of critical theory-style power analysis when comparing competing subjective narratives. This ultimately leads to a meaningless relativism, where everything is valid, where I can have 'my truth' and you can have 'your truth', and any attempt to introduce objectivity is seen as an exercise in power and oppression.

Where I think the problem lies is a fundamental confusion between language and reality. All human language is, by definition, a social construct, but the reality it describes is not. Language is not reality itself, but rather an attempt to describe reality, as closely as possible, based on our collective understanding of the world (at this particular stage of history). In a society where people are truly free, and where there is a commitment to the pursuit of truth, the use of language must describe the underlying reality as closely as possible. Indeed, when our understanding of the reality changes, for example via new scientific discovery, language must also change. On the other hand, language should ever only change whenever our understanding of the reality changes. Otherwise, we risk developing something like the Newspeak in Orwell's 1984.

However, postmodern philosophy gets this totally backwards. Postmodernism often confuses discourse (which is made up of language) with reality itself. This leads to the

false view that, if we change the language used in the discourse, we can change reality itself. This view is probably what motivates the move in recent years towards an ever more extreme form of political correctness. Of course, this view is both untrue and dangerous. Even if we force everyone to say that the sun rises in the West, it will still rise in the East tomorrow. Moreover, manipulating language to distort the public perception of reality is a favorite tactic of authoritarian regimes throughout history.

Anyway, since postmodern philosophy often conflates language with reality, and since language is always a social construct, this leads to the illusion that reality itself is a social construct. For example, since the language we use to describe gender is a social construct, gender itself must then be a social construct. It then follows that, if we deconstruct the language used to describe gender, then we effectively deconstruct and hence abolish the reality of gender itself (which would theoretically cure the problems of sexism, homophobia and transphobia!). Of course, all this is nonsense that won't lead us anywhere. It won't lead to anything constructive. All this will do is to cause a huge amount of unnecessary confusion throughout society, making proper rational debate impossible.

In conclusion, the attempt to deconstruct 'social constructs' that are actually not social constructs but actually cold hard reality, is a consequence of both critical theory's overly paranoid view towards the apparent reality, and

postmodernism's tendency to conflate language with reality. These futile attempts won't have any effect on the reality itself, but its harm is in causing widespread confusion around the use of language, hampering proper rational debate and preventing the resolution of important social problems.

## Are All Social Constructs Bad?

Gender isn't a social construct. But some other things that most of us value, including institutions like marriage, concepts like liberty, norms around decency and civility, and values like free speech, are indeed social constructs. Critical theory's attitude is that all these social constructs are oppressive, and need to be deconstructed. But is this true?

To answer this question, let's consider why critical theory wants to deconstruct almost every social construct. As I previously explained, critical theory inherits the Marxist view that all the culture in a given era is in the service of the underlying economic system and its privileged class. Furthermore, it also inherits the Gramscian idea of 'cultural hegemony', that the culture also serves to prevent oppressed people from seeing their real interests and keep them working within the existing system. If one believed these things, one would naturally be inclined to see oppression everywhere in the existing culture. One would naturally wish to abolish all the existing culture, and hope to start all society anew.

However, the Marxian and Gramscian views of culture are not proven facts, they are merely the opinions of some thinkers. On the other hand, it is a fact that our existing culture includes invaluable inheritance that has been passed down through hundreds of generations. Our cultural institutions are the product of centuries of evolution, and previous generations from long ago had to learn many lessons, often by the difficult way, to shape these institutions into what they are today: institutions that are suited to human nature as dictated by our biology, and can effectively bring out the best in humans while mitigating the less ideal aspects of human nature. I'm not saying that our culture today is perfect; it is not. Culture is always a work in progress, and must continue to adapt to both new scientific understandings and changing societal circumstances. But it is just common sense that throwing all that experience and heritage out isn't a wise move. It is just common sense that, if we threw all our cultural inheritance out and start from scratch, the chances that we would be able to build something that is at least similarly good is next to nil. Such common sense should prevail over any ideological considerations.

One of the most problematic things about critical theory thinking is that, because of its ideologically driven bias against existing conditions, it often critiques existing things without first adequately understanding why things are the way they are. It is too keen on deconstructing, and not keen

enough on appreciating what we have. The dominance of critical theory thinking in some parts of academia and the intelligentsia has caused an imbalance that favors destruction over preservation. No civilization in history was able to be sustained under these conditions. I believe this simply cannot be good for the future of humanity.

## *Moral Libertarian Perspective: All Social Engineering is Morally Unsound*

***This is an excerpt from The Moral Libertarian Idea by TaraElla.***

*Almost everyone say that hate social engineering. Many people hate social engineering with a passion, and for good reason. Most people's gut reaction to social engineering is that it is unfair and tricky, somewhat like rigging an election. For moral libertarians, who believe in the equality of liberty (and hence moral agency), social engineering is unconditionally unacceptable, because it means that those doing the engineering are making important decisions, often moral decisions, for the subjects of the engineering. Wherever there is social engineering, there is no respect for the principle of equal moral agency, and hence no respect for the equality between humans. From a moral libertarian perspective, social engineering is simply immoral.*

*Another thing about social engineering is that it is much easier to oppose social engineering designed to achieve outcomes you don't like. For example, conservatives are good at spotting the slightest leftist slant in public education curricula. But the same people would often justify pro-conservative social engineering, such as government policy that favors heterosexual relationships over homosexual*

*relationships, as either upholding tradition or upholding the will of the 'silent majority'. This is actually a double standard, because social engineering is still social engineering, even if it has been carried out for hundreds of years, and even if it is supported by the majority. From a moral libertarian perspective, the principle of equal moral agency is still violated, because the individuals making decisions in government are still making moral decisions that all other individuals in society must accept, even if against their own will. The government is still the moral master, and the people are still the moral slaves. In fact, if those supporting conservative viewpoints truly believe that they have the unwavering support of the majority, they really do not need the government to uphold anything. If they allow the government to step aside from governing the moral sphere, private individuals will regain their fair and equal share of moral conscience, and conservative individuals (which conservative politicians believe are the majority) will be able to live out their conservative beliefs by personal example, much more effectively than when government interference exists.*

*The left is similarly blind when social engineering favors their worldview. While the left is generally unsympathetic to social engineering for the sake of preserving the status quo, they are much more sympathetic to social engineering that will supposedly promote equality of outcome. In many leftist circles, free speech is becoming increasingly rare, and policed speech is increasingly becoming the norm. So-called safe speech is often justified on the need to protect the feelings of*

*minorities, but in reality it is a form of censorship, that effectively disallows certain ideas from entering the free market of ideas (or John Stuart Mill's cauldron of ideas if you prefer that analogy). Even if you start with, for example, the seemingly clear-cut rules of only prohibiting racist and homophobic speech, it effectively sets a precedent that can potentially disallow political speech promoting pro-life ideas (because it hurts the feelings of women who had abortions) or cultural expressions that are deemed to be cultural appropriation (because it hurts the feelings of people who don't wish to see cultural appropriation). And once it becomes acceptable to ban political speech and cultural expressions, there really is no limit to what else can be banned. A Stalinist dictatorship is the only logical conclusion.*

*Another worrying recent development is the prioritization of people's right to speak, based on their personal characteristics. This was first seen in the 'progressive stack' speaking system that was used in some Occupy rallies, where women and minorities were afforded priority in their right to speak. This system clearly sees people as members of groups rather than individuals, in a way not unsimilar to how old-school socialism saw people as solely members of their economic class, or how fascism saw people as solely members of their nation and their race. In the name of achieving some sort of group-based equality, the principle of equal moral agency between individuals is sacrificed. Furthermore, as the progressive stack is a social construct invented and maintained by leaders of leftist movements, it is a system in which they decide the rules, it is therefore by definition a*

*system in which the leaders have much more moral agency than anyone else. From my personal experience, it is not uncommon for those who have the right to decide who is to speak to use their power to favor those who will say what they want to hear. In recent years, I have heard from an increasing number of women and LGBT people complaining that they have been excluded from systems and institutions that are supposed to be inclusive, because those running the system don't like to hear what they have to say. (Those running the system often like to counter that people who promote 'regressive' ideas are to be excluded. However, this definition of 'regressive' is a subjective one, and often bears no relationship to the more objective definition of regressive I use, i.e. does not bring any new value to anyone beyond what has already been offered. In fact, I often suggest that, if an idea really meets the aforementioned objective definition of regressive, it will be rejected in the free market of ideas, so we don't need to do anything about it.)*

*p.s. A particularly worrying feature of leftist social engineering is that it is often inspired by theories arising from sources like philosophy, sociology or feminism. While I believe it is important for people to critically reflect on the state of our society, and many such theories have given us useful language and frameworks to discuss important issues, the theories themselves are almost always far from flawless, to put it mildly. In fact, I make this observation about history: although progressives have been the winners throughout history (because, by definition, only new ideas can change the course of history, restating old ones cannot), progressives of*

*any era only get a minority of things right, and more progressive ideas eventually get rejected than accepted. The French revolution's Liberty, Equality, Fraternity lived on, but their revolutionary calendar did not. Similarly, 19th century socialists played a very important role in highlighting the injustices of early capitalism towards the working class, but their demands to nationalize industries have been largely rejected. Karl Marx's prediction of the collapse of capitalism has not come true either. This is not to say that the investigation of society and the production of progressive ideas is not worthy. It just highlights the need for such ideas to be tested and refined in the free market of ideas.*

## PART III

*Mack: While I don't mind using people's preferred pronouns, I do see some people make the case for not doing so. Their case is that it is important that we stand up for reality, as part of the fight for a reality-based world, where facts are facts, science is respected, and free speech is always upheld. I can respect and understand that.*

*Tess: I always support free speech, so while I don't like being misgendered, I personally recognize that it is a person's right to say whatever they want. All I can do is to make my case as to why it's better to use people's preferred pronouns. But it's still important that nobody can compel another's speech. I personally disagree that using people's preferred pronouns is akin to denying reality. After all, there's no reason why pronouns must correspond to genetic sex all the time. Countries are generally called 'she' even though they don't have a genetic sex, for example. Language is about function, after all. As are most human institutions.*

*Sue-Jane: See, Mack? The whole issue about pronouns and reality is all a politically driven fuss about nothing!*

*Mack: I guess logically, you're right. But the thing is, many people feel like they need a way to stem the tide towards postmodern reality denial, and all its associated agenda. I*

*think people on both sides are making too much fuss about pronouns, an issue I personally don't care about. But the fact is, we need a way to stop the slide towards unreality.*

*Sue-Jane: If that's the case, that's a separate issue. We must deal with each issue separately on their own merits.*

*Mack: But how? I guess many people see social change that they are worried about, and they don't know how to deal with it.*

*Tess: As always, I think we first need to understand why exactly the change is happening...*

## Chapter 5: True Rationality Isn't Simply Reactionary

While we need to be aware of the harmful and insidious influence of critical theory and postmodernism on our society and culture, this doesn't mean that we should always simply do the opposite of what critical theory activists or postmodern activists do. After all, it is never a good idea to just always do the opposite of what your political opponents do. As the saying goes, we don't simply cease breathing or cease drinking water just because our political opponents do these things. Instead, while we should consciously reject any influence of critical theory and postmodernism in our own thinking, we should still use our own critical thinking, our own values and our own conscience to judge each issue and each idea on its own merits.

### Why Accommodating Trans People is not Capitulation to Postmodernism

One example of an attempt to oppose critical theory activists by doing the exact opposite of what they do is the practice among some conservatives to use gendered pronouns rigidly according to biological sex, explicitly refusing to make exceptions for trans individuals. It is as if they think that, if postmodern activists wish to erase the reality of biological sex (which they can't in reality anyway, but that's another story), then the antidote to that would be to rub this reality

in the face of others all the time, regardless of other considerations like compassion and practicality.

The accommodation of trans people should aim to make it easy for trans people to integrate into society so that they can contribute at their best level, while also taking in the concerns of other people, so that the process does not create resentment in society. In the whole scheme of things, pronouns are a relatively minor issue, in fact. However, since there has been much mainstream discussion on this particular issue, I will be using it as an example to demonstrate my point about trans accommodation.

While I respect and support the free speech rights of everyone to use pronouns as they please, I strongly disagree with the idea that using a trans person's preferred pronouns is an act of capitulation to postmodernist science denialism. This is because, even if we reject the postmodern arguments and completely accept the reality of biological sex, there are still several strong reasons for making reasonable accommodations towards trans people, including the use of their preferred pronouns. The first and most obvious reason is that, as a decent society, we treat people suffering from medical conditions with decency and compassion, including alleviating their burden where it is possible and not making life unnecessarily hard for them. Making accommodations for trans people is no more about 'denying the facts of biological sex' than building a ramp for physically disabled people is about 'denying the fact that they are disabled'. Both acts are

simply about making people's lives easier, so that they get to enjoy a more equal level of opportunity in society, and that their abilities do not get wasted. Nothing about accommodating trans people in everyday life makes us unable to acknowledge the reality of biological sex when it truly matters. Using a trans woman's preferred pronouns doesn't mean we can't acknowledge that she doesn't have periods and can't get pregnant, or that her medical needs are sometimes very different from genetic women, for example. It also wouldn't mean allowing a trans woman license to do whatever they like, regardless of the discomfort of genetic women. Since the fact that society accommodates trans people is based on the grounds of compassion and respect, it would be more than reasonable to expect trans people to repay others with the same compassion and respect. Which would obviously include not doing anything to make other people extremely uncomfortable!

## The Medical Science Case for Trans Accommodation

At this point, some people may argue that it is not good to indulge in a trans person's 'delusion', as if gender dysphoria is a form of psychosis akin to schizophrenia. This argument has been popularized by a few conservative media personalities, all of whom have no medical education or training. However, it is already well established in medical science and psychiatry that gender dysphoria is not a form of psychosis, and that there often is no effective 'treatment' other than the symptomatic treatment of gender transition. The clinical

evidence for this is clear, and is based on decades of clinical experience with a large population of patients with gender dysphoria. Furthermore, while gender transition does not actually change the genetic sex of a trans person, it is akin to symptomatic treatment to relieve the suffering of patients when a curative treatment is not available. Symptomatic treatment is a very legitimate and very important part of clinical medicine. To say that symptomatic treatment is akin to 'cooperating with delusion' is ridiculous.

Another way to look at this is, where a set of clinical symptoms is repeatedly described in the general population, a clinical syndrome is described and formalized in clinical practice, even if the exact etiology is not yet known. This is how the syndrome of 'gender dysphoria' has come to be an accepted diagnosis in clinical medicine. The fact that this syndrome has been repeatedly described and diagnosed in a consistent way throughout different times and different places is what proves that it is a 'real thing' rather than the delusional thinking of certain individuals, or a 'fashion of the day' identity. Furthermore, the fact that gender dysphoria is clearly a constant natural occurrence also supports the case for society to make reasonable accommodations for its existence.

A few people may further argue that the views of the medical establishment have been affected by the activism of radical activists. But this represents a lack of understanding of how medical science and clinical medicine work at the very least,

and potentially even represents a more sinister attitude of distrust towards the medical profession similar to that found in postmodernism. (What we really need to emphasize more is that, neither side of politics has a monopoly on anti-science attitudes, and both sides of politics are not above denying reality when it suits them.) In reality, modern clinical medicine has a strong emphasis on everything being 'evidence based'. What counts as a medical condition must be based on objective considerations of health and dysfunction, and not the cultural views of society. The description of medical syndromes must be strictly based on clinical experience, and the recommended treatments must be strictly based on clinical evidence. There really is no room for politically motivated influence in modern medical science and clinical medicine.

## Political Considerations Must Not Get in the Way of Good Science

While gender dysphoria is a well established and well described medical syndrome, the precise scientific causes of this syndrome remains unclear. In the interests of advancing the scientific understanding of the causes of gender dysphoria, several hypotheses have been offered, including pre-natal hormonal environment abnormalities, hormone receptor mutations, genetic imprinting errors, and so on. Some of these hypotheses could be 'offensive' to either critical theory and postmodern activists, or conservative cultural warriors, or even both. For example, many of these

hypotheses include an assumption that there are fundamental differences between male brains and female brains, something that critical theory-influenced radical feminists are unlikely to accept. Many of these hypotheses also point to trans people being essentially intersex, at least on the neurological level, if not on a whole-body level, something that conservative cultural warriors may not want to consider. Nevertheless, we should not let political considerations get in the way of good science. The generation and exploration of scientific hypotheses should never be limited by the preferences of political factions. We should protect the freedom of scientific research from being limited by those with a political agenda, left-wing and right-wing alike.

## Chapter 6: It All Started with a Historical Accident

To start reversing the social problems created by critical theory and postmodernism, we first have to understand that the rise of these ideas was a historical accident, and that their continued spread is therefore contingent on particular conditions. In particular, it should be understood that support for these extremist ideas is very dependent on context, and even generations who were once curious about these ideas could turn away from them when conditions change.

### A Generational History of Political Trends, From 1968 to 2008

Once upon a time, critical theory and postmodernism were very marginal. Back in the 1960s, everyone from French Communists to American Democrats and Republicans agreed that the ideas of Herbert Marcuse were a bad influence on the youth. No matter their nationality or their political affiliation, mature, responsible adults of that era instinctively knew that such destructive ideas could not be good for humanity.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the break that allowed critical theory thinking to spread into the mainstream came during the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was perhaps the most costly mistake in recent Western history, not only because of the huge economic costs and the many human lives lost during the war, but also because of the deleterious impact on Western culture for generations to come. During the Vietnam War, millions of young men found themselves at risk of being sent to fight, and potentially die, in a foreign country, in a war that had nothing to do with their own country's safety. This created an existential crisis in many young intellectuals, many of whom became disillusioned with the traditional cultural institutions they grew up with. Moreover, with the bipartisan support for the war in America and many other countries, the students could only turn to fringe political elements to gain support for their anti-war campaign. All this, combined with the immaturity of the student activists (most were under 25, thrust into political activism by the war before they were mature enough to understand many things), meant that there was now a big population of young people who were receptive to fringe and extreme ideas. College campuses across the Western world suddenly became centers for the dissemination of critical theory thinking.

After the Vietnam War came to an end, with the threat of conscription no longer present, college campuses largely reverted to their previous state, and political radicalism died down. Most Generation X students (born around 1964-1979) were largely unaffected by political radicalism and critical

theory thinking. In fact, many Americans Gen Xers voted for Reagan when they were young, and a plurality of American Gen Xers are still Republicans to this day. Political radicalism was not to return to college campuses until after 2010, and its influence would effectively skip three decades of college students before then.

Most baby boomers also went on with their lives. They got jobs, got married and started families, and many of those who had previously been radical students gradually realized the impracticality and even the danger inherent in the views of their youth. Perhaps because of the stability of the 1980s and 90s, or maybe because they subconsciously knew that a stable and healthy society was better for raising children, in middle age, most baby boomers became very family and community orientated. They effectively passed this attitude onto their children, mostly the older half of the Millennials (born in the 1980s). These older Millennials are now in their 30s and some of them have begun running for political office. The value they place on strong families and a healthy social fabric is clearly seen in many of their platforms. Critical theory and postmodernist thinking is clearly absent from the vast majority of these platforms. This has created the interesting situation where in today's political field, you are more likely to find a socially radical candidate in their 60s or 70s rather than in their 30s or 40s.

## The Return of Critical Theory Radicalism, From 2008 to the Present

While most baby boomers gave up the radicalism of their student days, a minority of them continued to dream of radically transforming society, and their ideas sometimes got even more radical with time. For example, some of the radical boomer students became academics, and they used their academic work to further develop critical theory and postmodern theory. Therefore, while mainstream Western society enjoyed a prolonged period of peace and prosperity during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, ideas even more radical (and perhaps even more destructive) than those of earlier critical theorists like Marcuse and Foucault were brewing, out of sight of the mainstream public. The fact that these ideas developed in a way that was closed off from mainstream scrutiny meant that they were increasingly out of touch with reality. It also meant that there was no moderation from the counter-balance of mainstream 'common sense'. Hence, bad ideas like how minorities needed 'safe speech' and that free speech was oppressive against minorities, for example, were able to thrive. The foundations for a potentially very misguided and very destructive wave of radical cultural activism was hence already laid down.

Starting around the end of the first decade of the 21st century, several things happened, and in combination they allowed critical theory and postmodernist thinking to re-

enter the mainstream conversation, and especially influence the politics on college campuses. Firstly, the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 ended a long period of stability and prosperity, and it shattered confidence in existing values and institutions across the board. Less than three years after the crisis began, by 2011 there were mass movements like Occupy Wall Street calling for systemic change. While there was no clear agreement as to what this change would look like, this moment provided an opportunity for previously fringe ideas of all sorts to enter the mainstream discussion. Secondly, the popularization of political discussion on the internet and social media allowed previously fringe ideas to reach many people, leading to their adoption by many who perhaps don't fully understand the context and the implications of these ideas. (Note that I'm not advocating for censorship here; the answer to dealing with the proliferation of problematic ideas is NEVER censorship!) Finally, several divisive political developments in the Western world, including the Brexit referendum and the US elections in 2016, caused severe political polarization and reaction in some circles, perhaps leading to an increasing appeal of fringe ideas for many people, via the doctrine of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'.

The result of all these developments is that critical theory and postmodern thinking had effectively entered into mainstream cultural and political discussions by around 2015, and this development further accelerated after the events of 2016. Divisive identity politics that pit one group against another became common, and people began literally

'checking their privilege' using dedicated apps, literally participating in an 'oppression olympics' to claim more oppression points than other people. It also became cool to be a 'victim' of oppression, and victim mentality was celebrated at the expense of promoting resilience. Support for free speech plummeted on college campuses across the West, and disrupting and de-platforming unwanted speakers became increasingly common. Such activities also affected the normal studies of many college students, but many dare not speak up in fear that they would be accused of being 'privileged'. Unscientific ideas like 'gender is a social construct' are not only promoted; they are enforced as the new dogma, with anybody daring to say the opposite promptly labeled as a harmful influence and 'canceled' in many social circles. There is simply no room for rational debate in this 'new normal'. Respect for individual liberty and freedom of conscience have plummeted to an all-time low.

## How to Tame The Beast: The Lessons of Recent History

The present situation does seem bleak. However, one of the greatest lessons of history is that the present does not necessarily predict the future. As previously outlined in this chapter, many baby boomers were radicalized to accept or at least be curious about critical theory thinking during their college student days. However, as they grew older, as their wants and needs in life changed with the advent of parenthood, and as the general environment changed to

become more peaceful and stable, most boomers gave up their views from their student days, and became family and community orientated people. They became the responsible adults who raised my generation, the responsible adults who provided us with a mostly healthy environment to grow up in, who made an effort to make the world safer and more friendly for the sake of us. And now, many of us are paying that debt forward, by doing our best to promote healthy communitarian values in an increasingly divided world.

The point is, support for the extreme ideas of critical theory and postmodernism is context dependent. It tends to happen when young and inexperienced people are faced with what they consider a hopeless future, with no solutions for what they see as widespread injustice. This was the reason for students embracing critical theory in the 1960s; it is also the reason for students embracing critical theory and postmodernism today. Furthermore, this is also likely to at least partially explain the increased tendency for young LGBT individuals to adopt these ideas, for example. On the other hand, once people are more hopeful about the future, and once they have meaningful things to believe in and a stake in caring for the health of society, they are less inclined to embrace extreme ideas like critical theory and postmodernism. This was effectively why most baby boomers turned away from critical theory. Understanding this provides us with a way to tame the beast for a second time, and perhaps for good this time. In the final chapter of this book, I will draw on this insight, and propose exactly what needs to be done.



## *The Moral Libertarian Way to Social Justice*

***This is an excerpt from The Moral Libertarian Idea by TaraElla.***

*In an encouraging development, there has been an increased focus on social justice, both economically and socially, in recent years. As a liberal, I see this focus on providing equal opportunity for all as a good thing. However, I do have strong reservations about the approach of some activists, and these reservations have intensified in recent years. As a moral libertarian who believes in the equality of moral agency as the most important morality imperative in politics, things like so-called safe speech, no-platforming, political correctness, progressive stack speaking systems, and the exclusion from movements of people who express opinions the activist establishment label as 'regressive', are clearly not things I can accept. All these represent the activist establishment making cultural and moral decisions that other people are pressured to accept in one way or another, and in many cases also represent a top-down distortion in the free market of ideas.*

*In fact, I believe that sticking to the principle of equal moral agency is the route towards true social justice for all. After all, social justice is essentially another way of saying equal opportunity for all. Equal moral agency and equal opportunity are essentially the same thing. On the other hand, whenever the principle of equal moral agency is*

*violated, there is not a situation of equal opportunity by definition.*

*From a moral libertarian perspective, things like no-platforming and the progressive stack are actually against social justice by definition, because they clearly violate the equality of moral agency. This is because, if some people can speak their minds but some cannot, or some people are given a higher priority to speak than others, there is clearly no equality of moral agency. But let's approach this from a more facts-based approach. To improve social justice, we need to know the injustices that are actually happening, and to obtain this knowledge we need to let people speak up about their lived experiences and their grievances. Not allowing some people to speak or placing them last in the queue effectively prevents them from getting the social justice they need. Back in the 1960s, college students started a Free Speech Movement, so they could voice injustices in relations to the Vietnam War and conscription, civil rights and women's rights. In time, these voices changed society forever. If conservatives were able to no-platform these activists, none of that progress would have happened. The New Left back then understood the importance of free speech. It is very regrettable that the current generation of leftists do not share this attitude.*

*Some leftists believe that they can subjectively classify certain ideas and attitudes as regressive, and censor them out, while not affecting social justice. In reality, this is not only*

*misguided, this is moral hubris. From a moral libertarian theory perspective, this represents the activist establishment making cultural and moral decisions for everyone else, deciding what they can say or think. Therefore, the principle of equal moral agency is clearly violated. But this is not just an issue in theory. In recent years, I have increasingly heard from women, ethnic minorities and LGBT individuals that have been excluded from so-called progressive movements because of certain beliefs they held or certain things they said. The activist establishment's decision to no-platform ideas they see as regressive actually has the effect of turning away some of the very people they are supposed to help. If we look at it from an intersectional perspective, it gets worse. For example, ethnic minorities, whether black, Latino, Asian or indigenous, are more likely to be religious and hold traditional viewpoints, and this also applies to female and LGBT members of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the radical solutions proposed by the activist establishment often provoke intense backlash in ethnic communities and the developing world, causing ethnic minority women and LGBT individuals to favor more moderate solutions. It is therefore unsurprising that those complaining of exclusion are very often ethnic minorities, the very people intersectional feminism is supposed to help. In fact, if intersectional feminism is practiced this way, it is not real intersectional feminism, but GLIF (gatekeeper limited intersectional feminism).*

*The liberal alternative is to let the free market of ideas select the best solutions for social justice, and also improve ideas*

*concerning social justice over time. In a truly free market of ideas, solutions that fulfil the previously unmet needs of individuals will survive and thrive. Such solutions are progressive by definition, whether the activist establishment like them or not, because they fulfil a previously unmet need. A good example is same-sex marriage, a solution to a previously unmet need (the commitment and legal protection of same-sex couples) which was subjectively seen by the then-LGBT activist establishment as regressive (because they saw it as assimilation). As same-sex marriage was a progressive idea by definition (since it fulfilled a previously unmet need), it gradually won over more and more support in the free market of ideas, despite the bitter opposition of some establishment activists. On the other hand, ideas that do not offer anything better than what has already been previously offered are, by definition, regressive, just like if a company decided to sell a computer based on 20-year-old hardware and software. In a truly free market of ideas, we do not need to fear such regressive ideas, for they will eventually be eliminated by the market due to a lack of 'buyers'.*

*The free market of ideas also allows the development of the best solutions that will provide justice for the largest number of people over time. This is because, as differing and sometimes contradictory ideas enter the 'market' and compete against each other, proponents of ideas will have to be receptive to criticism and suggestions from other parties and improve their ideas over time so that they remain competitive. This effectively encourages repeated cycles of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, evolving and refining our ideas*

*over time. Another great feature of the free market of ideas is that it allows minorities within minorities a better opportunity to ensure that any solution for justice also serves them well. Where a minority is seen as a homogenous group and its voice is whitewashed by the activist establishment to sound uniform, the needs of minorities within minorities are usually not well heard or considered. But where there is a genuine free market of ideas, where ideas can flow freely without gatekeepers being able to erect barriers, minorities within minorities can make their case just like everyone else, and the activist establishment will either be forced to change to accommodate their needs, or face being discredited in the free market of ideas.*

*The free market of ideas, being made up of many minds, each understanding their own part of the human experience, can effectively process a vast amount of information about the injustices that are occurring out there, and select the best solutions that can improve a wide variety of injustices at the same time. On the other hand, movements controlled by elite activist establishments often focus only on what people in the establishment can see, resulting in solutions that do not serve the people they are supposed to serve. Using an economic analogy, the free market of ideas is like a free market of goods and services, where complicated information about demand, supply and costs is efficiently synthesized into appropriate prices that do not cause a surplus or shortage of goods. On the other hand, the elite activist establishment is sort of like the centrally planned command economies that used to exist, where the plans seldom met the actual needs of*

*the people, resulting in either a surplus or a shortage of goods.*

## Chapter 7: How To Tame The Beast

### We Need to Raise Awareness About The Problem

To effectively tackle any problem, we must first be aware of it, and be able to define it. This is, perhaps, the most important part of our work right now. Awareness about the effects of critical theory and postmodernism has been increasing in right-leaning circles in recent years, but there remains misunderstandings even in the majority who are aware of the problem. In moderate and left-leaning circles, however, awareness about the effects of critical theory and postmodernism is still extremely low. This represents the biggest problem, in my opinion, because critical theory and postmodernist activists mainly target left-leaning people for their recruitment and alliance building. Without much resistance to their ideas in left-leaning circles, critical theory and postmodernist activism keeps growing every year. Without many people to challenge their ideas in left-leaning circles, critical theory and postmodernist thinking keeps spreading unchecked every year.

While right-leaning circles have become much more aware of critical theory and postmodernism in the past 20 years or so, this awareness has been communicated in a somewhat confused manner. For example, the proper terms critical theory and postmodernism are often not used. Instead, the whole thing is often called 'cultural Marxism'. While critical

theory and postmodernism were largely invented by heretic Marxists, the term 'cultural Marxism' often creates misconceptions about what we're really talking about (some might mistakenly think that it is about the cultural policies of the former Soviet Union, for example). It also ignores the fact that real Marxists generally do not accept these ideas either. Furthermore, 'cultural Marxism' is often depicted to include ideas such as multiculturalism, which is not part of critical theory or postmodernism. Whatever one's view on multiculturalism may be, the fact is that it was first invented as a policy by a Liberal Canadian government, for the purpose of integrating new immigrants. This policy was later adopted by the governments of Australia, Sweden, Germany, and several other countries, for the same purpose. It is not based on the critical theory worldview, nor is it based on any kind of Marxian worldview. Bundling unrelated ideas together only serves to muddy the waters, and severely weaken one's critique. Something I often have to remind people in debates is that, even where one disagrees with two or more ideas, as long as they are unrelated, they should be critiqued separately.

The way some right-leaning commentators set out to oppose critical theory and postmodernist thinking has also created confusion among the general public, and impeded the spread of awareness across the political spectrum. Too often, right-leaning commentators attempt to smear the whole left with the critical theory extremist brush. As a result, their otherwise completely correct critique of these extremist activists just won't be taken seriously in left-leaning circles.

Where this kind of politically motivated critique keeps coming in large volumes (as it has since 2015), left-leaning intellectuals eventually invent excuses to ignore it all, like how it supposedly only happens on college campuses, and how it supposedly only represents immature behavior from college students. The eventual effect is that left-leaning circles become completely resistant to any discussion about the harms of critical theory activism.

Another thing is, while critical theory activists often call their project 'social justice', we should all know that it doesn't represent real social justice, as it has been defined in the mainstream throughout the 20th century. Still, some right-leaning commentators somehow let the radical activists get away with appropriating the term, effectively agreeing that social justice is identity politics, no-platforming, cancel culture, and the like. They further reinforce this notion when they say things like how the real divide today is whether you support social justice, how the concept of social justice is invalid, or how 'social justice is cancer'. The problem with letting critical theory activists appropriate 'social justice' is that it confuses many people, because that's not what 'social justice' has meant, and still means, for most people. In particular, left-leaning circles have always prized their commitment to social justice, as the word originally meant. If those opposing critical theory and postmodernism brand themselves as anti-social justice, left-leaning circles would just ignore what they have to say.

The overall point is, we need to cut through the noise and spread awareness about the problems critical theory and postmodernism are creating, and we need to correct the multiple misconceptions out there. It won't be an easy task, but we need to do it. One way to do it would be to start a conversation with a friend. Another way to do it would be to give a book like this one to a friend to read.

## We Need to Provide a Better Alternative

Raising awareness about critical theory and postmodernism, and vigorously making our case against these ideologies in the public arena is important. We have the power of rational reason behind us, we have the scientific truth behind us, and there is no reason why we can't win every debate decisively. However, looking at the bigger picture, I think this 'culture war' can only be won if we are able to provide a better, more compelling alternative. We need to provide hope and confidence, where critical theory sows confusion and doubt about everything from our fundamental institutions to the scientific truth. We need to stand for individual liberty and free speech, to defeat critical theory's attempt to justify authoritarian actions using fundamentally flawed arguments. We need to provide a vision of unity in diversity of thought, to defeat critical theory activists' hypocrisy of causing division between groups yet demanding conformity within groups. Our vision is the grand vision of the Western Enlightenment, and there is every reason to believe that this vision will eventually defeat the critical theory worldview

comprehensively. After all, in the free market of ideas, the better idea always wins in the end.

The fact that critical theory, postmodernism and their derivative ideas have generally been developed and incubated in academia means that any alternative we provide must also have an academic side, so that we do not cede the entire humanities-intellectual sphere to the critical theory worldview. In other words, we need more academic debates and discourse that are rooted in other worldviews. For example, the Moral Libertarian worldview provides a framework to resolve many social issues, and can provide an alternative framework to analyze these issues. The more we use alternative frameworks to conduct intellectual analyses, the more we can compete with the critical theory framework, and prevent its monopoly in certain intellectual circles.

As we saw in the previous chapter, people, in particular young people, are more likely to turn to extremist ideologies like critical theory and postmodernism when they are frustrated with the state of society, do not see a path for change, and do not see a future they can believe in. Conversely, when they have something they believe in that they can work for, and when they believe they are part of a community they can be proud of, they are much more likely to turn away from those ideas. This is why I believe an inclusive, truly open-minded and truly compassionate vision of society is most able to defeat the rise of critical theory and

postmodernism. As we saw in Chapter 5, we fail to uphold this vision if we simply act opposite to what critical theory proponents appear to support every time, regardless of the consequences on other people's lives.

Where we are fundamentally opposite to critical theory is in our overall vision. But in our stances on individual social matters, we should prioritize being true to our vision of being inclusive, open-minded and compassionate, and we should avoid being reactionary out of misunderstanding, frustration, or politically driven hostility. If we act in a reactionary way to all sorts of social problems, we will just end up discrediting ourselves, and playing into the hands of the cultural radicals.

## The Power of Positive Thinking

Finally, it must be emphasized that positive thinking is perhaps the most important and effective antidote to the critical theory worldview. In fact, Marcuse himself feared that positive thinking would prevent people from uptaking his views, which is why he promoted negative thinking. Positive thinking effectively immunizes the mind against the negative thinking pathway that critical theory attempts to open up. By cultivating positive thinking, the negative thinking pathway that critical theory requires is effectively blocked.

Given the highly jargonistic nature of much of critical theory, it may not be possible to bring about the widespread understanding of critical theory in the general population that would be required to generate widespread resistance to its agenda. However, positive thinking is easy to promote, and could be a very effective antidote to the recent spread of critical theory thinking.

## Concluding Words

Critical theory and postmodernism have made Western society culturally and politically unwell in recent years. However, with the right arguments, the right vision, and a more widespread awareness of what is happening, we can effectively fight back. The best days of the Western Enlightenment project could still be ahead of us.

# Appendix 1: The Moral Libertarian Manifesto

## Preamble

A ghost is hanging over the West: the ghost of liberalism. The ghost of only partly fulfilled yet already abandoned promises of life and liberty, of equality and fraternity. Liberalism is not quite dead yet, but nor is it truly alive. It can only watch hopelessly as far-right and alt-right white nationalist elements duel it out with far-left neo-Marxist tendencies, with liberty being the biggest loser of each and every battle. The right had made 'liberal' a dirty word for four decades, and now a new generation of the left is about to do the same, the two long-time enemies burying liberalism in a rare bipartisanship.

Is it too late for liberalism? No, not really. But to return to life, it will need a life force. Life force comes from conviction, from moral principles, and from confidence. Only the moral libertarian idea, with its grounding in the one simple principle of morality that has been the unspoken core of liberal thought in history, will be able to resuscitate liberalism and return it to its previous vitality. Moral libertarians seek to clearly spell out their principle of Equality of Moral Agency (EMA), and vigorously apply it and defend it in the free market of ideas.

The rest of this manifesto is structured similarly to Karl Marx's famous Communist Manifesto of 1848, not because we are Marxists, but because it is a familiar format, and the historic spread of Marxism is testament to the effectiveness of this format. We hope that the Moral Libertarian idea will spread far and wide. (We have however decided to make it shorter, because two centuries on people like reading long texts much less.)

## 1. What is the Moral Libertarian Idea

Liberalism is an idea with a history stemming from the Western Enlightenment. The old world of master and slave was being swept away. In its place, a long line of thinkers from John Locke onwards theorized about how we can have a structure of liberty and equality instead. Since then, much has been achieved, but as we all know, the project is still incomplete. Furthermore, since the early 20th century, the rise of new forms of collectivism have repeatedly threatened to put liberal ideas in the dustbin of history. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many thought that the end of liberalism was inevitable, with fascism and communism being the only two choices in the future. Many fascists proudly claimed that individualism was for the 19th century; that the 20th century would be the century of collectivism. But liberty proved more resilient, and re-asserted itself in the post-war world, while fascism was largely discredited and buried once its immorality was exposed. More than half a century on,

liberalism is again facing a crisis, and various forms of authoritarian collectivism are again promising utopias of various kinds. Liberalism is not as popular anymore, in a world where the dichotomy is increasingly left vs right, socialist vs capitalist, 'anti-fascist' vs 'alt-right', etc.

But it would be too soon to declare the irrelevance of liberalism once again. Why? Liberalism is the most moral ideology, and ideologies that are immoral at their core will sooner or later be discredited, like the fascism of the interwar period. Liberalism will be left standing the victor, like in the post-war period, as long as it has not been completely killed by its authoritarian opponents. Therefore, our mission is to give liberal ideals as much life force as possible. Such life force can only come with idealism, moral conviction and clear principles. We believe that the one core liberal idea is the Equality of Moral Agency (EMA), i.e. each and every individual should have equal ability to live and act out their sincerely held vision of morality, and no outside force, no matter if it is an individual despotic ruler or the tyranny of collectivist pressure, should be able to diminish any part of this. This is in fact the only morally valid structure for society, because as inherently flawed human beings, none of us are morally correct all the time. Therefore, to be able to force another to abide by one's moral values will inevitably mean forcing another to act in a way that is immoral at least some of the time. To allow this would effectively be to allow the conditions that caused the Holocaust, where thousands of people enabled the Holocaust to happen just because they were not allowed to oppose the will of Hitler. In other words,

other ideologies are too similar to fascism, from a moral libertarian point of view.

Moral Libertarians argue for and uphold the principle of Equal Moral Agency at all times, on all issues, during all debates. We are well aware that we not only do not yet have equality of moral agency as things stand, the work to create a structure of equal moral agency will likely take generations to come. Each year, each decade, each generation, we strive to make things closer to the equality of moral agency, by insisting this principle be the core consideration for any policy of reform, and to encourage reform wherever we find that things are inconsistent with this principle. Bit by bit, we will be able to create a structure providing effective equality of moral agency for all. We are inherently reformist, because revolutions require there to be a strong leadership group, making this option against the equality of moral agency in principle. Furthermore, history has shown that once the leadership group is entrenched in power, it does not easily give up its extra moral agency (nor is it able to anyway). On the other hand, slow and steady wins the race.

Consistent with our core principle, Moral libertarians will strictly uphold the freedom of speech and freedom of conscience for all, and the freedom of religious belief for all. We will also strongly support reforms that remove state-sanctioned inequality of moral agency, for example marriage laws which privilege opposite-sex marriage above same-sex marriage. We will argue for the equal respect of individuals

regardless of their characteristics or their political beliefs, left, right or center. We will also argue, on the same grounds, for the equal respect and treatment of all individuals, regardless of ethnic background, gender and gender identity, sexuality, and disability status. We strongly oppose on principle all discriminatory treatment, whether justified from 'conservative' grounds of tradition, or 'progressive' grounds of historical debt or disadvantage.

## 2. Answering Criticisms of Moral Libertarianism

Does Moral Libertarianism harm traditions and traditional morality? No, it doesn't, simply. Moral libertarians oppose the top-down maintenance of tradition by those in power, but people are free to live by, embrace and promote traditional points of view. In fact, our staunch opposition to top-down enforcement will, especially in the longer run, prove to be the greatest protector of traditional values.

Does Moral Libertarianism fail to protect minorities and excuse bigoted behavior? No, we staunchly argue against discrimination, and are the only political faction which does so consistently. While we cannot support reducing freedom of speech, we do not believe this to be detrimental to minorities, because only open discussion will be effective in changing attitudes. Furthermore, moral libertarians uphold John Rawl's famous Veil of Ignorance in all our decision making, and thus are politically race-blind, gender-blind and

sexuality-blind, while aiming to create systems that work for every single individual equally. Many of us support anti-discriminatory legislation in employment, for example, because we believe in society needing to be group-blind, as individualists.

Does Moral Libertarianism, with its encouragement of individualism, encourage selfishness and discourage communitarian thinking? Moral libertarians are opposed to the tyranny of the majority and strongly encourage individualist thinking. However, once individuals have their freedom to think and act, there is nothing preventing them from deciding to act for the benefit of the community. However, each individual will have their own right to determine what they believe is the greater good, rather than have a specific kind of greater good dictated to them by other people.

Does Moral Libertarianism neglect economic equality, especially historical economic equality? Moral libertarianism is not attached to any economic doctrine, and supports the democratic determination of economic policy, consistent with our support for democratic means of determination for every political issue that is unavoidably collective. In other words, every voter in the country should have a say. This way, we can have an economic policy that will serve the economic liberty of a broad range of people. The fact that, when the people have spoken they do not choose a certain economic policy (libertarian, Marxist, or anything in

between) doesn't mean that there is anything wrong. It's democracy in action.

### 3. Relationship to Other Liberal Movements

Moral Libertarians explicitly state the assumption that underlies all other liberal movements, thus its worldviews and aims do not differ from any other liberal movement, at the core. The main difference is that we explicitly proclaim and live by the principle of Equal Moral Agency (EMA). Therefore, we avoid being liberal in technicality but being illiberal in practice. Left-liberals sometimes fail to challenge their further-left allies' encroachment on freedom of speech, while thin libertarians sometimes fail to challenge those who claim to be libertarian but are really Neoreaction-style authoritarian conservatives at the core, for example. By upholding the EMA, our liberalism is made stronger.

Where other liberal movements, including classical liberals, social liberals, cultural liberals, libertarians, and liberal conservatives, act according to the EMA principle, and are thus acting as truly liberal, we will support them. Otherwise, we will not.

### 4. Moral Libertarian Priorities for the Next Decade

In culture, we will uphold the freedom of speech and conscience for all. We will staunchly oppose any move towards so-called safe speech, and any attempts at no-platforming speakers, no matter what their political stance is. We will uphold freedom of religion for every individual, including the right to religious attire (opposing burka bans etc.), and the right to promote religious-based beliefs (e.g. the wide variety of religious views on abortion). We will also uphold the right of individuals to be entitled to express their sincerely held beliefs and truths, regardless of race, gender, gender identity or sexuality. Therefore, we support multicultural liberty (e.g. the choice of singing competition contestants to sing in a foreign language every week if they wish to), and we support LGBT liberty (e.g. the liberty of any gender expression without negative consequences from society). We will discourage everyone in society from taking cultural opinion personally or adopting a victim mentality, because this will be bad for rational discourse in the free market of ideas.

In politics, we will advocate for the removal of state-sanctioned privileges on both grounds of individual privilege and cultural value privilege, including unequal marriage laws and adoption laws, and work regulations that unfairly impact religious minorities, for example. We will also advocate for strong action to protect the sanctity of free speech and the prevention of so-called safe speech and no-platforming from becoming the new norm.

## Appendix 2: The 1990s, a Beacon of Hope with a Warning

We need to remember that, after the upheaval of the 1960s and 70s, when Western society almost disintegrated, there eventually came the 1990s, arguably a golden period of peace and prosperity. The divisive (and in some cases destructive) mood of the 1960s and 70s eventually gave way to the pro-family and pro-community spirit of the 1990s. While the 1990s were not without its problems, it represents the high watermark of social cohesion in recent decades, and it serves as a recent enough historical beacon that we can be inspired by. If things could turn around like that once, they could turn around like that again. The best days of the Western Enlightenment project are still ahead of us.

But we must also remember what led to the end of that golden period: the events of the 2000s. Where the 1990s was open-minded enough to embrace gradual adaptive change, the 2000s saw Western society become much more close-minded and reactionary, largely as a result of the political mood set by the Bush administration. During the 2000s, if you supported gay marriage you were against family values. If you opposed the Iraq War you were against American values. The building frustration during this reactionary period eventually led to momentum for culturally radical ideas in the following decade. The lesson is that we shouldn't stray

into a generally reactionary mood, because it can end up destroying everything.

## Appendix 3: Lessons from the Gay Marriage Movement

A society that is inclusive, compassionate, open-minded and hopeful about the future should work towards the inclusion of everyone. Of course, the recent critical theory-influenced attempts at 'inclusion' are clearly not the way to go. Inflammatory and divisive attitudes, for example calling for the 'cancellation' of straight white men in certain Hollywood roles, as if it is all a zero-sum game, should be rightly condemned. Instead, the general aim should be to integrate minorities into our great existing social institutions, as much as possible. Furthermore, if there is any reform to pursue, it should be done in an inclusive way, that sincerely deals with the concerns of as many people as possible, and aims to bring as many people along as possible during the process.

The movement to legalize gay marriage has been very successful in the past two decades, resulting in the successful legalization of gay marriage in all major Western countries except Italy and Switzerland as of this writing, and with relatively little backlash in most countries. Polls in multiple Western countries have shown that support for gay marriage is now over 60%, a figure that has actually been confirmed by referendum in Ireland and Australia. There are several important reasons for the success of this movement: firstly, it never pit gay people against mainstream society. Instead, it was all about extending a fundamental pillar of society to a

previously excluded population. It was all about making mainstream society better, rather than tearing it apart. Secondly, the leaders of the movement generally encouraged rational debate over the issue. There was a sincere attempt to deal with concerns from multiple quarters of society. There was no dismissing concerns by calling people 'privileged'. Finally, it was a constructive movement, rather than a destructive movement. It aimed to build something new, not destroy any existing thing. Moreover, it never wanted to take anything away from anyone; there was no zero-sum attitude at all. These are all features that any reform, going forward, should learn from.

Also available from TaraElla

# **The Moral Libertarian Idea**

A book all about what Moral Libertarianism is, why it's the most moral way to resolve conflicts, and how it can be applied to resolve a wide range of social issues.